

SEMESTER AT SEA COURSE SYLLABUS

Discipline: Psychology
Semester and Year: Fall, 2008
Course Title: Positive Psychology
Upper or Lower Division: Upper
Faculty Name: John Zelenski

Suggested Pre-requisites: Introduction to Psychology

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course explores the emerging field of positive psychology, or the scientific study of optimal human functioning. Topics will include how scientists define and measure happiness, personal characteristics and circumstances that promote happiness, and cultural similarities and differences in the ways happiness is pursued and experienced. In addition to considering scholarly works, students will undertake experiential exercises and reflection that will promote productive approaches to personal well-being.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. Understand the methods positive psychologists use to create knowledge.
2. Gain a familiarity with major theories and findings in positive psychology.
3. Explore similarities and differences in happiness across cultures.
4. Develop a better understanding of your own personal happiness.

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF COURSE:

(Please note that changes to this schedule will be announced in class. Additional or alternative readings will be added to the course folder.)

1. Introduction to course and expectations; Peterson Ch. 1.
2. Personal engagement; Exercise due; (Peterson Ch. 2 –optional).
3. Positive clinical psychology; Maddux (2008).
(Brazil)
4. Port reflections; Pleasure and positive experience; Peterson Ch. 3.

5. Assessing experience; Kahneman et al. (2004),
 6. Predicting experience; Wirtz et al. (2003); (Schkade & Kahneman (1998) –optional).
(Namibia)
 7. Towards a positive psychology in South Africa; Louw & vanHoom, (1997).
(South Africa)
 8. TBA
 9. Happiness; Peterson, Ch. 4.; Diener & Seligman (2002).
 10. Folk views of the good life; King & Napa (1998)
 11. Quiz #1
 12. Money; Dunn et al. (2008); Vohs et al. (2006); Kahneman et al. (2006).
(India)
 13. Positive institutions; Peterson Ch. 11.
(Malaysia –A-day section)
 14. Positive thinking; Peterson Ch. 5.
(Malaysia –B-day section)
 15. catching up
(Vietnam)
 16. Chinese happiness; Zhang (2008).
(China)
 17. Interdependent selves and SWB; Heine (2001), Suh & Oishi (2002)
(Japan)
 18. Character strengths; Peterson Ch. 6.
 19. Catching up
 20. Positive interpersonal relationships; Peterson Ch. 10.
 21. Wellness; Peterson, Ch. 9
(Hawaii)
 22. [Note: Jeri Carey’s guest lecture (class 12) on biology, self-talk, etc. included on quiz 2]
 23. Personal project report due; wrapping-up and looking forward; Peterson Ch. 12.
- Final Exam: Quiz #2

FIELD COMPONENT:

Students are required to participate in three field directed practica and report on their experiences. Practica must include at least two of those recommended below, and at least one lead by Dr. Zelenski. One practicum may be completed as an independent, or as part of another organized trip, but if not included in the list below, the practicum and student's plans must be discussed with Dr. Zelenski prior to the event. During practica, students are encouraged to interact with local people as much as possible, and to make observations of surroundings and behavior.

*SALVADOR, Service project: Calabar Favela

SALVADOR, Bicycling in Pitacu Park: Urban Ecology

CAPE TOWN, Khayelitsha Township visit

CAPE TOWN, Township Music

CAPE TOWN, Service visit: Amy Biehl Foundation Trust

CHENNAI, Welcome reception

CHENNAI, Service visit: Missionaries of charity orphanage

CHENNAI, Yoga demonstration

CHENNAI, Service visit: Disabled Children's Home

*PENANG, Religions of Malaysia

PENANG, Service visit: St. Joseph Orphanage

HO CHI MINH CITY, Service visit, Da Thien school for handicapped children

*HO CHI MINH CITY, Former UPI photographer and the museum of war remnants

HONG KONG, International student exchange: Chinese University of Hong Kong

KOBE, the gardens of Kyoto

*Led by Dr. Zelenski

Fieldwork Evaluation

Following each field experience, students must write a concise 2 to 3 page paper that integrates their experience with course material. Students are encouraged to select from one of the topics below, but alternatives will be considered with prior approval. Some practica will be more conducive to particular topics, but topics may be repeated with new observations/practicca. Practica reports are due 2 days after leaving port.

Consider hedonic and eudaimonic routes to happiness. How did your experience promote one or both? Did you observe others pursuing one or both, and how did you make this inference?

Consider the relationship between money/material goods and happiness. Compare your observations of happiness with research findings discussed in class.

Consider the relationship between physical environments (e.g., built vs. natural, population density, aspects of living or working space, etc.) and psychological well-being. Were some environmental features associated with your or others' emotions? What might this suggest about selecting or modifying environments to promote well-being?

After speaking with some local people about happiness, consider cultural similarities and differences in the importance placed on happiness, the kinds of pursuits assumed to promote happiness, and what it means to be happy.

Based on your observations, consider the role religion plays in daily life and happiness. Where do you observe religious behavior or symbols? Are these sources of happiness? How does religion promote (or detract from) happiness, and what kind of benefit/impediment does it seem to provide?

Clearly negative events such as warfare, discrimination, abuse, etc., provide challenges to personal and societal happiness; yet they also provide a context to learn about positive psychological processes (e.g., resilience, forgiveness, growth, and hope). Note such a challenge (perhaps historical) and consider recovery. What factors seem to facilitate benefit in the face of adversity? How might further recovery be promoted, or what lessons might be applied to other situations?

OTHER METHODS OF EVALUATION

Two **quizzes** containing multiple choice and short answer questions will assess knowledge of readings and class material.

Each student will also complete a **personal project** that culminates in a written report of approximately 8-10 pages. There are three options for this project:

1. Read *Happier* (Ben-Shahar, on reserve) and complete three of the exercises he suggests.
2. Read *The Art of Happiness* (Dalai Lama & Cutler, on reserve), identify a piece of advice that you can implement in your daily life, and do it.
3. Complete at least one service-related field program (i.e., one that explicitly involves helping others). This option also requires finding three academic sources beyond the assigned readings (see below).

As you engage in these activities, be mindful of your personal well-being, and any changes you experience before, during, and after. (You are not required to become happier; be honest in your assessment.)

In a written report, clearly describe what you did and your personal observations during the process. In addition, link your project with academic readings and/or course content (this is where the outside readings come in for option 3). That is, identify and briefly describe an area of psychological theory and/or research that suggests your project could have an impact on well-being. Finally, think of people you met during the voyage (beyond other passengers). Speculate as to why their experiences of the project might be similar or different than your own. Integrate these things in a paper with good narrative flow, i.e., avoid presenting them as a series of disconnected responses to the guidelines above.

Final grades will be calculated using the following weights:

Quizzes (30% each, total 60%)
Personal project report (20%)
Field work reports (20%)

Grading Scale: Final letter grades will be determined using the following cutoffs: 98 A+; 93 A; 90 A-; 87 B+; 83 B; 80 B-; 77 C+; 73 C; 70 C-; 67 D+; 63 D; 60 D-. (You must achieve the minimum percentage without rounding.)

Attendance and Participation: Attendance at all classes and participation in activities and discussion are mandatory. Although not represented above, failure to meet these requirements will result in significant deductions from the final grade.

Plagiarism & the Honor Code: Please keep in mind that you have agreed to abide by the honor code. You must provide proper citations for quotes and ideas that are not your own. (Please use APA style for citations and references.) Make yourself aware of these responsibilities, and consult Dr. Zelenski (or Library staff) if you have questions. Instances of lying, cheating, or stealing will not be tolerated, and risk honor code referrals.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOK

AUTHOR: Chris Peterson
TITLE: A Primer in Positive Psychology
PUBLISHER: Oxford University Press
ISBN #: 9780195188332
DATE/EDITION: 2006
COST: \$41.50

RESERVE LIBRARY LIST

AUTHOR: Tal Ben-Shahar
TITLE: Happier
PUBLISHER: McGraw Hill
ISBN #: 978-0-07-149239-3
DATE/EDITION: 2007

AUTHOR: The Dalai Lama & Howard C. Cutler
TITLE: The Art of Happiness
PUBLISHER: Riverhead Books
ISBN #: 1-57322-111-2
DATE/EDITION: 1998

ELECTRONIC COURSE MATERIALS
(see course folder)

- Diener, E. & Seligman, M.E.P. (2002). Very happy people. *Psychological Science*, 13, 81-84.
- Dunn, E. W., Aknin, L. B., & Norton, M. I. (2008). Spending money on others promotes happiness. *Science*, 319, 1687-1688.
- Fleeson, W., Malanos, A. B., & Achille, N. M. (2002). An intraindividual process approach to the relationship between extraversion and positive affect: Is acting extraverted as good as being extraverted? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 83(6), 1409-1422.
- Heine, S. J. (2001). Self as cultural product: An examination of East Asian and North American selves. *Journal of Personality*, 69(6), 881-906.
- Helliwell, J. F. (2005). *Well-being, social capital and public policy: What's new?*, Paper presented at the special session on well-being at the Annual Meetings of the Royal Economic Society, Nottingham.
- Kahneman, D., Krueger, A. B., Schkade, D. A., Schwarz, N. & Stone, A. (2004). A survey method for characterizing daily life experience: The day reconstruction method. *Science*, 306, 1776-1780.
- King, L. A., Hicks, J. A., Krull, J. L., & Del Gaiso, A.K. (2006). Positive affect and the experience of meaning in life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 90, 179-196.
- King, L. A. & Napa, C. K. (1998). What makes a life good?. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 75, 156-165.
- Louw, J. & van Hoorn, W. (1997). Psychology, conflict and peace in South Africa: Historical notes. *Journal of Peace Psychology*, 3, 233-243.
- Maddux, J. E. (2008). Positive psychology and the illness ideology: Toward a positive clinical psychology. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 57, 54-70.
- Schkade, D. & Kahneman, D. (1998). Does living in California make people happy? A focusing illusion in judgments of life satisfaction. *Psychological Science*, 9, 340-346.
- Sheldon, K. M., Elliot, A. J., Kim, Y. & Kasser, T. (2001). What is satisfying about satisfying events? Testing 10 candidate psychological needs. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 80, 325-339.

Suh, E. M., & Oishi, S. (2002). Subjective well-being across cultures. In W. J. Lonner, D. L. Dinnel, S. A. Hayes, & D. N. Sattler (Eds.), *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture* (Unit 7, Chapter 1), (<http://www.wvu.edu/~culture>), Center for Cross-Cultural Research, Western Washington University, Bellingham, Washington USA.

Wirtz, D., Kruger, J. Napa Scollon, C., & Diener, E. (2003). What to do on spring break: The role of predicted, on-line, and remembered experiences. *Psychological Science*, *14*, 520-524.

Wong, P. T. P. (2008). A less traveled road to happiness.
http://www.meaning.ca/archives/archive/art_road_to_happiness_P_Wong.html

Zhang & Veenhoven (2008). Ancient Chinese philosophical advice: can it help us find happiness today? *Journal of Happiness Studies*, *9*, 425-443.